

Meeting Guidelines and Procedures

Types of Meetings

Regular Meetings

Each Board and Commission holds regularly scheduled meetings on days, times and at places established by City Council resolution. All meetings are open to the public. Each regular meeting is noticed by posting an agenda that includes a general description of each item to be discussed.

The responsibilities of staff liaisons include:

- Providing background and context on a subject
- Alerting Boards, Commissions and Committees of possible detrimental actions
- Offering professional expertise and recommendations about an issue
- Keeping the board, commission or committee focused on priorities
- Interpreting codes, ordinances, City policies and other regulations
- Ensuring that motions and minutes reflect the intent of the Board and Commission
- Educating new members about their role and responsibilities
- Coaching individual members to participate and develop their skills
- Enforcing laws that apply to public meetings (Brown Act, Public Records Act, Conflict of Interest, etc.)
- Requesting information from other City departments when needed by the Board or Commission
- Keeping Board and Commission members aware of City Council policy direction

Draft Reports for Advanced Public Distribution (Administrative Policy, Chapter II, Article II, Section 5):

Depending on the situation, it may be appropriate to provide a draft of a report for Boards and Commissions or the general public in order to get feedback before presenting a final report to Council. In such cases, appropriate individuals/groups should be notified of upcoming agenda items as well in advance and be provided an opportunity to review reports of interest.

Draft reports are to be prepared in the same format as regular Council reports, with "Draft" stamped upon them. The City Manager must be provided a draft of the report for approval two weeks before it is due to be made public.

A copy of any draft report presented to a Board or Commission or other members of the public for advanced review should be transmitted to the City Council at the same time. The initiating department must provide nine copies of the approved draft report to the Office of the City Manager for distribution to the City Council, City Manager and City Clerk.

The advanced review process is particularly important to Boards and Commissions. The process ensures that there will be consistency between staff recommendations of Boards and Commissions and the Council. When a Board or Commission makes a recommendation to the Council on an issue, those actions should be noted in the report immediately prior to the staff recommendation.

Special Meetings

A Board or Commission may call a special meeting by providing notice 24 hours in advance of the meeting to all of the members and to all media outlets who have requested notification. The notice states the time, place, and business to be transacted at the meeting, and no other business may be considered at the special meeting. Notice is required even if no action is taken. At every special meeting the Board and Commission must provide the public with an opportunity to address the Board and Commission on any item described in the notice before or during consideration of that item. The special meeting notice describes this right to comment.

Adjourned Meetings

Regular and special meetings may be adjourned to a future date. If the subsequent meeting is conducted within five days of the original meeting, matters properly placed on the agenda for the original meeting may be considered at the subsequent meeting. If the subsequent meeting is more than five days from the original meeting, a new agenda must be prepared and posted. When a meeting is adjourned to a subsequent date, notice of the adjournment must be conspicuously posted on or near the door of the place where the meeting was held within 24 hours.

Agenda

Board and Commission meetings are governed by an agenda. The agenda for the meetings are prepared by the Chair and the staff member. A member may request an item be placed on a future agenda by speaking to the Chair, the staff member assigned to the Board or Commission, or by consensus of the Board or Commission. Agendas are distributed to the members and posted at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

Members may only discuss or take action on items that are listed on that meeting's agenda. If a topic is raised during the public comment period or during the meeting which is not on the agenda, a member may make only a brief response and can then request that the item be placed on the agenda for a future meeting. An agenda template is included in the Appendix.

Informational Packets

Informational packets typically contain the agenda for the upcoming meeting, supplemental materials describing the agenda items, and any communications to be presented at the meeting. This packet will be delivered to the members of the Board and Commission and interested members of the public at least 72 hours prior to each

meeting. Members should review these packets prior to each meetings and contact staff with questions.

Quorum

A majority of the members of the Boards and Commission constitutes a quorum for the conduct of business. When less than a quorum appears at a noticed meeting, the Board or Commission must adjourn to a future date. If no members appear at a noticed meeting, the liaison should announce the meeting is cancelled due to lack of a quorum and adjourn the meeting to a future date and provide notice to members and to the media in accordance with the special meeting notice provisions.

Minutes

Minutes of all Board and Commission meetings are prepared by City staff. Minutes are presented at a subsequent Board or Commission meeting for approval by the members. Written minutes approved by the Board or Commission constitute the official record of its activities. Additions and corrections to the minutes may be made only in public meetings, with the approval of a majority of the Board and Commissioners members, and not by the private request of individual members. Approved or draft Board and Commission minutes are included in the Council agenda under Information Items. A Guideline for Preparing Minutes and a template is included in the Appendix.

Effective Meetings

Board and Commission meetings are the time and place for decisions and actions. The quality of those decisions and the resulting impact on the community is the responsibility of each member. Each member has an obligation to prepare, discuss, evaluate, review, and select the best possible alternatives. The following guidelines lead to constructive meetings:

Preparing for the Meeting

- Review the meeting agenda and information packet prior to each meeting.
- Review background information, as applicable, on items coming before the Board or Commission.
- Prepare to handle sensitive matters in a positive way.

Meeting Procedures

Stick to the agenda.

- Define issues and tasks clearly
- Observe the rules of order.
- Encourage participation.
- Discourage disruption.
- Try to resolve differences.
- Summarize progress from time to time

Meeting Follow-Up

- Put items on the agenda for the next meeting.
- Assign tasks to members for the next meeting.

Public Hearings

State Law requires that certain items of business be advertised for a formal Public Hearing before being considered by a public body. Additionally, a Public Hearing may be called by the City to maximize public input on a topic even if not legally required. The City Council and Planning Commission are the City bodies typically involved with Public Hearings.

Public Hearings must be conducted in a fair and impartial manner, and the public must be given an opportunity to be heard. The Chair or Mayor may limit or extend the time each member of the public may testify, however, the time limitations must apply to all speakers, regardless of the position they represent. The general format for considering a Public Hearing item is as follows:

- Staff provides an overview of the proposal and responds to any questions raised by the Commission.
- Members note any relevant facts not included in the staff report or other written materials provided to the commission.
- The Chairperson opens the Public Hearing.
- Members of the public are each allowed three minutes in which to express their opinions.
- The Chairperson closes the Public Hearing.
- The Chairperson responds, or asks staff to respond, to any questions raised during the course of the Public Hearing.
- Members deliberate the item.
- Members take action on the item.

Public Input On Non-Public Hearing Items

Members of the public have the right to express their views on any item included on a Board or Commission agenda. In addition, members of the public may express their views on any item that is not listed on the agenda under the "Citizens to be Heard" portion of the meeting agenda. A time limitation for each speaker, typically three minutes, may be imposed.

While members or staff are permitted to respond to any questions or to seek clarification concerning a point raised, it is imperative to note that the Brown Act specifically prohibits any public body from discussing or taking action on an item that is not listed on the agenda. Therefore, if the members wish to discuss the item, the topic should be agendaized for a future meeting.

Parliamentary Procedures

This section is covered under "Structural Guidelines".

Effective Conflict Management

Public Hearings or citizen input meetings are sometimes difficult to manage. Participants are usually highly motivated and often nervous. There may be residents with strongly differing views. As an advisory member, your role is to guide the discussion so that all viewpoints are presented, not eliminated.

The following suggestions should help manage conflict and confrontation effectively:

Anticipate differences by learning about the topic beforehand so you can concentrate on the meeting's purpose.

- Set the meeting rules early and make sure everyone abides by those rules without exception.
- Explain the purpose of the meeting.
- Ask that all speakers clearly identify themselves for the record. (Although this cannot be required of speakers, this information can help improve dialog at the meeting and facilitate follow-up by staff or commissioners.)
- Set an acceptable time limit for testimony (generally three minutes). A consistent time limit for all speakers is essential.
- Try not to overreact to inflammatory comments. Most are expressions of frustration and do not require response. Try to redirect frustration into constructive discussion. Ask questions. Refer to the speaker by name. Reinforce areas where you agree. Seek to bridge differences. Do not return insults.
- Try to avoid speaker-to-audience conversation. The purpose of meetings is to help make the commission aware of considerations relating to an issue at hand—not to engage in debate.
- Comments and questions during the public testimony period should be focused on gaining relevant information to make a decision on the issue.
- Once testimony has ended, members should be invited to discuss their views.
- View the Public Hearing as an example of participatory government in action at the local level. Make it your personal goal to make the Public Hearing work and ensure that everyone is fairly heard.